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Creative and innovative online learning and teaching in LIS education: building student confidence via co-creation and partnership.

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Creative and innovative online learning and teaching in LIS education: building student confidence via co-creation and partnership

In March 2024 I had the great privilege to present an invited talk at the Annual Meeting of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTPL) which took place in Edinburgh. The talk offered an overview of several creative and innovative teaching and learning projects and initiatives over the last few years, which have formed part of the MSc information and Libraries studies course at the Robert Gordon University. This article offers an overview of the key areas covered at that talk with indicative visual examples I hope would be of interest to colleagues working in different libraries and could spark ideas for further discussion and future collaboration. Thank you to ABTAPL, and particularly to Jon Purcell and Sarah Mann for the kind invitation to present my work.

The Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries Edinburgh (22nd March 2024)

This article presents different projects and initiatives that have been organized in collaboration with academic staff at the Robert Gordon (RGU), as well as the RGU Library and other external organisations, including the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIPS)¹ and OneHE², an organization that offers microlearning aiming to support Higher Education Institutions to improve student outcomes though effective teaching.

MSc Information and Library Studies

The MSc Information and Library Studies³ course is designed around the practical applications of library and information management work, aiming to help students develop into creative and innovative practitioners, equipped with professional, managerial and transferable skills and competencies required in the contemporary working environment. The master's programme is

¹ Scotland - CILIP: the library and information association. Available from https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group content view.asp?group=201288&id=694702&gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwl4yyBhAgEiwADS EjeOXvnSdHIZDheB7f9csoFOEV5aRUDNjfJlviFqZG-7itaQxeEr3ZmxoCxqMQAvD BwE

² OneHE. Available from https://onehe.org/about-us/

³ Information and Library Studies Course with MSc Degree | RGU University – Aberdeen, Scotland, UK | RGU. Available from https://www.rgu.ac.uk/study/courses/931-pgcert-pgdip-msc-information-and-library-studies

accredited by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals⁴. The last reaccreditation was in March 2020, where we received four commendations for the a) the enthusiasm and professionalism of the course team, which was reflected in uniformly positive feedback from students about their experience of the programme; b) the firm grounding of the course in professional practice, which had provided a firm basis for students to develop their careers; the quality of assignment work and dissertations was of particular note; c) the excellent online learning environment, which incorporated material in a range of formats and acted as a catalyst for communications between students, and with staff; and d) the excellent support provided by the Library informed by their close links with the course team and students. The themes we examine in the course are mapped on CILIP's Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB)⁵, which describes the central specialist processes that are exercised by information professionals in the library information and knowledge management community. The key knowledge and skills that make our profession unique include several different competencies some of which are discipline based and others are transferable: organising knowledge and information, research skills, information governance, literacies and learning, planning and management but also other soft skills, such as customer focus, marketing, IT and communication.

At RGU we work closely with employers to offer courses that make our graduates particularly desirable to local, national and international companies and organisations, maintaining a strong vocational focus combined with academic research and working in close partnership with professional bodies such as CILIP. In 2017 we celebrated the 50th year anniversary of the course meeting former staff and students to mark half a century of librarianship and information science education. We were also the first UK institution to offer an online distance learning course in Information and Library Studies and the first Professional Doctorate in Information Science (DInfSc). In addition, our subject group holds iSchool⁶ status, making it part of an elite research group of world information schools.

The MSc Information and Library Studies course is offered entirely online (both in part-time and fulltime mode of study), and it is delivered via Campus Moodle (Figure 1), our online learning environment where we provide online reading lists, digitised book chapters, as well as live and recorded sessions. In the course we embrace the vision that, in our modern connected and technological world, information professionals are called to assert new roles, develop a whole spectrum of new skills and digital competencies, and demonstrate ownership of digital information services via a culture of integration, connectivity, and adaptability. It is important to stay up to date with new skills and keep on developing for life, be creative, as well as passionate and confident. We also hold the view that students should develop into a peoples-person with strong communication skills and user orientation. Therefore, we aim to equip students to be not only a manager of information but also be able to promote life-long learning alongside information services, be at the forefront of legislation and policymaking, and be able to bridge gaps, as well as create offline and online networks/partnerships/collaborations with organisations in the information sector and beyond. We also aim to support them to become creative and innovative practitioners with extracurricular opportunities, such as the 'RGU Innovation Award' which is an extra-curricular microcredential that helps students to develop your competencies in responding to disruption, participating in innovation, and designing solutions. One of the modules of the course, 'CBM808 Information,

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⁴ CILIP accredited qualifications - CILIP: the library and information association. Available from https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/Qualifications?gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwupGyBhBBEiwA0UcqaH7aVuaUUWf2VuHScaMGqb-b1zmCpd42chUd9Qcl8lmFA8j4V2ZzHxoCkVMQAvD BwE

⁵ Professional Knowledge and Skills Base - CILIP: the library and information association. Available from: https://www.cilip.org.uk/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=18881697&gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwupGyBhBBEiwA0UcqaNBtY6acMpXNMFrC https://www.cilip.org.uk/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=18881697&gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwupGyBhBBEiwA0UcqaNBtY6acMpXNMFrC https://www.cilip.org.uk/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=18881697&gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwupGyBhBBEiwA0UcqaNBtY6acMpXNMFrC <a href="https://www.cilip.org.uk/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=18881697&gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwupGyBhBEiwA0UcqaNBtY6acMpXNMFrC <a href="https://www.cilip.org.uk/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=18881697&gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwupGyBhBEiwA0UcqaNBtY6acMpXNMFrC <a href="https://www.cilip.org.uk/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=18881697&gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwupGyBhBEiwA0UcqaNBtY6acMpXNMFrC <a href="https://www.cilip.org.uk/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=18881697&gad source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwupGyBhBEiwA0UcqaNBtY6acMpXNMFrC <a href="https://

⁶ iSchools. Available from https://www.ischools.org/

Seeking and Use'⁷ is accredited with the award and allows students to gain Level 1 competences (which include curiosity, creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking).

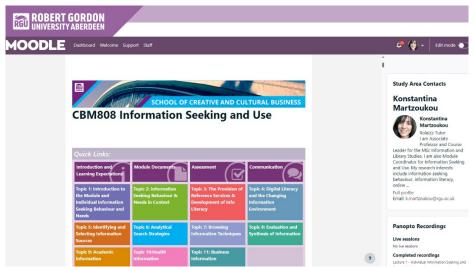


Figure 1. Campus Moodle

Although our course has been online since 2000, in the past few years, we have implemented many new and innovative initiatives in collaboration with internal and external partners, which aim to offer our students practical, networking and transferable skills. Several of these initiatives support the direction of open pedagogy: creating in partnership with students open educational resources (OER) (Wiley 2013)⁸. We are of the firm belief that "Through open pedagogy, students become empowered not just as users but as creators of information. Through this, students can see how their work extends beyond the class assignment and helps others" (Schultz, and Azadbakht, 2023)⁹. In addition, our work supports co-creation, defined as a close collaboration between learners and teachers...welcoming learners' perspectives and actively involving them in the educational (design) process (Bovill et al. 2016)¹⁰. An overview of some of these key initiatives are offered below.

CILIPS New Voices

The 'RGU student series' (Figure 2) was established in 2019, is a partnership with the CILIPS New Voices¹¹ blog. The blog is managed by the 'CILIPS Students & New Professionals Community (SNPC)'¹². Via the 'New Voices' blog, Library and Information Science (LIS) students and new career professionals have the chance to share their perspectives. The aim is to create a space where those new to the profession can connect with and support each other through sharing experiences and advice. Selected academic work by master's students is published yearly in the form of an opinion-based blog post on a topical theme of interest for libraries and is shared with the professional community of librarians. For example, in 2020, the theme of the blog posts had an emphasis on the global pandemic with the following topic: "In the post COVID-19 professional world, what information literacy, digital literacy or

⁷ CBM 808 Information, Seeking and Use. Available from https://www.rgu.ac.uk/study/courses/3195-information-seeking-and-use#:~:text=Information%20seeking%20and%20use%20helps,advantage%20and%20informed%20decision-making.

⁸ Wiley, D. 2013. What is open pedagogy? Improving Learning. Available from https://opencontent.org/blog/archives/2975

⁹ Schultz, T. AND Azadbakht, E.S. 2023. Exploring Open Pedagogy. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 17(1). Available from https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1631&context=comminfolit

¹⁰ Bovill C., Cook-Sather, A., Felten, P., Millard, L. & Moore-Cherry, N., 2016. Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms and ensuring inclusivity in student–staff partnerships. *High Education*, 71(2), pp. 195–208.

¹¹ CILIPS New Voices. Available from https://www.cilips.org.uk/category/new-voices/

¹² CILIPS Students & New Professionals Community (SNPC). Available from https://www.cilips.org.uk/branches-groups/snpc/

media literacy competences are important for information professionals to develop, in view of how the pandemic has changed the world?". In academic session 2023/4 the topic addressed the role of information professionals in supporting information literacy skills development for using generative artificial intelligence tools.

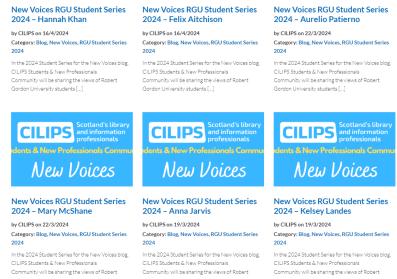


Figure 2. CILIPS New Voices RGU Series

Professional Skills Enhancement

As part of another module on the course, CBM300 Professional Skills Enhancement, students have the opportunity to embark on an external work-based opportunity or an RGU internal project, developing useful practical experiences and networking with staff from different types of libraries (e.g., school, public, academic). If learners are already employed in the sector, they can critically reflect upon their existing working experience and organise within their working environment an opportunity to learn new knowledge and develop skills. Students also develop reflective practitioner skills using a reflective diary and compiling a reflective portfolio with S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) objectives and clear personal development goals. Previous examples have included:

- Working with the Robert Gordon University Library on the design brief for an online educational game, the purpose of which would be to communicate the new UKRI Open Access policy to researchers of all disciplines and professional levels.
- Contributing to the 'Improvement and Promotion of a library website to a Wider Audience
 Using Web 2.0', an e-learning project where the student acted as an eLearning 'champion'
 encouraging peer participation and facilitating the flow of information between staff and
 students.
- Assisting with compiling a literature review on Syrian refugees' information experiences, transcribing interview data and also running the blog of the New Syrian Scots project.
- Contributing to the running of a free open access network via OneHE, 'Information, Digital and Media Literacy (Mindsets)'. The purpose of the network is to engage globally educators, librarians, learning and teaching support professionals in critical discussions and creative collaboration relating to the lifelong development of information, digital and media literacy.

Virtual projects could be anything from offering help in conducting a practical information related task to collecting new data from people/sources, analysing existing data, writing a report to investigate a problem/issue which relates to a specific area of work, organising an online collection, exploring user needs/trends, developing a toolkit/ a training guide/short course/, designing a website/blog/social media space, conducting market research, writing a business/marketing plan, testing out a system, writing a consultancy report with recommendations and many more.

Ayzel Calder, one of our previous students from Canada, who had the experience of taking on a virtual placement project offers some insights:

"The experience still offered me the ability to apply my theoretical knowledge to a real-life scenario the, to use what I knew to create an efficient and organised system that would benefit the organisation my placement was with. Participating in my placement virtually created an environment that challenged me constantly. From those challenges, I developed new skills, bettered old ones, grew as a student, and learned to adapt to new environments and be confident in them" ¹³.

Reflective Professional journal

The final stage of the course is the master's research project, which forms a core aspect of students' learning journey with diverse skills developed, including academic writing, research data collection and analysis, interpersonal skills, critical evaluation, communication, data management, knowledge organisation, presentation and ethics. However, master's research does not form part of the research output of any academic institution, except for those that are selectively published in academic journals or presented at conferences. As a result, a lot of impactful, interesting and valuable research is never discoverable by a global community of scholars and practitioners.

To address this issue, since 2021, we launched an innovative student-led journal, 'The Reflective Professional' in collaboration with RGU library and we are currently preparing volume 4. The 'Reflective Professional' is an open access journal in information science and information related disciplines, providing research, theoretical perspectives and reflective professional practice accounts connected to students' academic and practical work. The journal aims to provide students a platform to publish their own work in a fully open access journal using an open journal hosting service. 'Reflective Professional' publishes master's and doctoral students' work, critical reviews and short opinion/reflective articles on contemporary information science related issues and developments. The content is licensed under a Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0 license.

The project is an innovative means for empowering students with graduate employability and reflection skills beyond set curricula, emphasising the human capital and employability dimension in modern professionals. The journal has its own style guide and license agreement and every year, it recruits student interns to work as Editorial Assistants (Figure 3). The students have previously presented their work in different conferences such as 'The European Conference on Information Literacy (ECIL)' and 'RGU Learning and Teaching Conference'. The 2024 student Editorial Intern was Alan Evans who prepared a short video testimonial 15 to talk about some of the skills developed as part of that experience.

¹³ Virtual Placement: Adapting to a Different Environment – Ayzel Calder (cilips.org.uk). Available from https://www.cilips.org.uk/new-voices-virtual-placement/

¹⁴ Reflective Professional. Available from https://journals.rgu.ac.uk/REF-PRO

¹⁵ Student video testimonial on working as Editorial Intern for Reflecitve Professional, Vol. 4 https://youtu.be/wPvSuruumjg

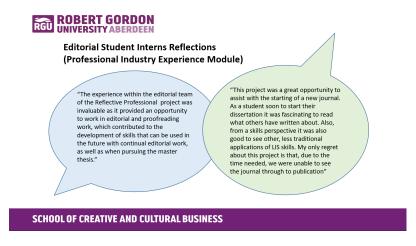


Figure 3. 'Reflective Professional': Student Editorial Assistants Testimonials

OneHE 'Information, digital and media literacy: Mindsets'

In Higher Education, there is a continuing and growing interest in issues, which relate to students' development of information, digital and media literacy for participating, collaborating and communicating ethically and responsibly in the digital environment. These place emphasis on experiences from educational contexts but also from those situated outside students' formal academic experiences (everyday life, workplace), whose value has become even more important after the pandemic. OneHE 'Information, digital and media literacy: Mindsets' has been developed to be a global online forum for conversations and debate around emerging mindsets for the lifelong development of students' information, digital and media literacy. It is a freely available online community (X: @OneHEmindsets) which addresses students' transitions in and out of HE based on developing information, digital and media literacy and critically reflecting on their value for informed, active and engaged civic, social and cultural participation, as well as personal growth and development (creativity, innovation, career development and employability, self-esteem, self-expression). The online community is freely accessible via the global network¹⁶. It is co-ordinated in collaboration with academic librarians, Ms Kirsten MacCormick and Ms Amanda Brennan from Glasgow Caledonian University.

The community brings together an international and interdisciplinary member base (e.g., information literacy, digital and media experts, academics in different subject areas, librarians, learning technologists and students). We also collate interesting projects and links to resources from around the world, addressing the themes of focus for the community and organize different online events, which, so far, have attracted hundreds of people from the international learning community to showcase work, discuss opportunities and engage in collaboration. To-date 'OneHe Mindsets' has recruited several student interns to work with the community and has organised a number of freely available online events (e.g., webinars, fire-chats and interactive workshops) covering diverse topics such as: information literacy online delivery approaches in COVID-19; students' online communities of learning; the design of learning to enhance metacognitive skills and harness virtual learning; student belongingness in the online environment; enhancing students' digital innovation and reflection skills; personalised video instruction to online information literacy; young people's information and digital literacy; approaches to evaluating political 'facts' in the fake news era; and communities of practice for staff development in information literacy. Examples of events can be found via the OneHE Mindsets YouTube Channel. Some of the work of the online community was

¹⁶ OneHE. Available from www.onehe.org

 $^{^{17} \} One HE \ Mindsets \ You Tube \ Channel. \ Available \ from \ \underline{https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3q3oSluWhmzydSuZGJJu7w}$

earlier presented at the European Conference on information Literacy (ECIL)¹⁸. In 2023 and 2024 OneHE Mindsets worked in partnership with 'The Scottish Academic Libraries Cooperative Training Group (SALCTG)'¹⁹ to organise a 'Student Research Showcase'. The purpose of the showcase event was to empower young professionals and new researchers in the area of information science, librarianship, information management and related disciplines and create an open forum to share their research with the wider community. In 2024 we were very pleased to have with us in several brilliant student presenters from Edinburgh Napier University, Strathclyde University and Robert Gordon University. We were also honoured to have with us the National Librarian of Scotland and Chief Executive, Aminah Shah, to introduce the event.

Maddie is Online

Another project we have been working on with the direct contribution of MSc Information and Library Studies students is 'Maddie is Online'. It is an innovative educational project that engages students as partners to produce open learning and teaching material on digital literacy, digital citizenship and online safety, following co-creation and an inclusive pedagogy. The project is linked to Robert Gordon University's strategy to deliver innovative research that makes real impact to society through the interdisciplinary research themes of 'Living in the Digital World', 'Inclusive and Creative Societies' and 'Health and Wellbeing', strengthening collaboration with the public sector and transforming people and school communities. The openly accessible online educational toolkits (with Creative Commons Copyright Licenses) contain learning activities and resources and have been widely shared in schools in Scotland. 'Maddie is Online' addresses everyday life issues that children encounter online and offers educators, librarians and parents an engaging and fun series of activities, harnessing the educational advantages of cartoon video animation. It is aimed at children (aged 9-12-year-old) as a means of engaging them critically with digital literacy, resilience and citizenship principles, which have emerged as key directions in government policy agendas. We have recruited several students to work on the research project on the basis of funded internships by the Scottish Library and Information Council and the Scottish Government (supported by Digital Xtra Fund). The work has also been published in academic journals and conferences with the students as co-authors. Currently, the project has four series: Series 1. 'Online Resilience', Series 2. 'Misinformation', Series 3. 'Copyright' and Series 4. 'The Ethics of Online Safety and Security' (Figure 4).



Figure 4. <u>Maddie is Online Bookshelf</u> contains the free educational toolkits as e-Books to download.

¹⁸ European Conference on Information Literacy 2021 - Best Practice talk on OneHE Mindsets community (youtube.com). Available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgyNmcg44vY

¹⁹ The Scottish Academic Libraries Cooperative Training Group (SALCTG). Available from https://salctgblog.wordpress.com/#:~text=SALCTG%3A%20Scottish%20Academic%20Libraries%20Cooperative,the%20needs%20of%20academic%20Libraries. The showcase was organised in collaboration with Mr Andrew McDougal from the National Library of Scotland and Ms Lisa Gardiner, Ms Kirsten MacCormick and Ms Amanda Brennan from Glasgow Caledonian University.

Recently the project also created a new website²⁰, which offers easy navigation to the available content, with links to download the free online toolkits, to order a print version of the toolkit, if required, and to book a consultation, which explains all the steps to follow for using the resources at school or at home. As the project is not-for-profit, booking a consultation helps to support the development of new topics in the series recruiting young professionals to work on the series and offer incentives to students as well as young people to engage with the series donating their voice-overs and creative talent.

Digital Competencies Project

The digital competencies project is an ongoing research project at RGU to explore students' digital competencies via a series of online self-assessment surveys which have led to the development of a Digital Competencies Toolkit (DCT). The DCT (Figure 5) offers ideas for training and development, using both internal RGU existing material and external resources and courses and it is available as an openly accessible e-Book and has been compiled with the contribution of students, using the software Canva. Central to the compilation of the toolkit is the concept of co-creation, via active learner involvement, working closely with students for the development and updating of its content. This approach invites learners' perspectives, motivates active learning, and enhances learners' feelings of engagement with the topics explored. The participatory design and collective learning approach also helps students to identify digital skills areas of importance to them based on their discipline. Three MSc Information and Library Studies students have been recruited in different semesters to collate and evaluate resources on the skills areas of the toolkit, with the purpose of supporting them to develop essential data duration skills as future academic library professionals. The participatory design and collective learning approach also helped students to identify digital skills areas of importance and created the foundations for fostering the importance of critical reflection in students.



Figure 5. The Digital Competencies Toolkit (extract from the toolkit aimed at nursing students)

Conclusion

This article has covered several initiatives and projects that have taken place as part of the MSc Information and Library Studies course, over the past few years, based on the principles of open pedagogy, co-creation and partnership with students. These have helped students to develop diverse skills and have offered opportunities for networking and making new contacts with library professionals. We welcome further discussion and collaboration with colleagues from libraries, other academic institutions, and communities of interest. We are always open to share additional details on any of the above projects and we would be interested to find more about other initiatives that foster

²⁰ 'Maddie is Online' website. Available from https://www.maddiesonline.com/

